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POLICY FOR WATER USE AND CONSERVATION FOR  
WESTERN MONTANA

WESTERN MONTANA FISH AND GAME ASSOCIATION

about 1960

It has become increasingly apparent to those interested in any phase of the potential uses and conservation of the waters of Western Montana that in order to provide for the best possible management of these waters and to safeguard the basic interests of the State of Montana as well as the general public, a broad, carefully-studied policy covering all phases of water use and management must be developed. Western Montana citizens find themselves confronted almost constantly with the necessity of making personal decisions on various controversial projects relating to some use or management scheme for waters in their area, and yet no basic philosophy or overall plan has been established to give these citizens any real basis for decisions or idea of the broad aims and purposes which should underlie this overall plan.

For example, it may be that one or more large scale impoundments are necessary for future development of the upper Columbia River system. Yet we question whether any one of these should be considered alone and fought over on the questions of its isolated merits or shortcomings without reference to all other proposed projects in the territory and without reference to the fact that Western Montana is one of the few remaining regions of the United States in which much of the watershed is composed of high quality recreational land. If it is to be shown on the basis of broad overall planning that such impoundments must be provided on the upper Columbia River system in Western Montana, then the citizens should be made aware of this and allowed to choose from among the alternatives those which best fit into the basic policy and best provide for the future interests of Western Montana.

Formulation of this broad policy should, we feel, have as its underlying framework a classification of the major rivers, streams, and lakes based on use. In setting up this classification, it is also our firm contention that outdoor recreation values should receive equal consideration with other major water uses in any well-balanced, forward-looking water resource policy. It should be recognized that we must retain for the future some unspoiled recreation areas—not only for the residents of this region, but also for the vastly increasing number of people from other sections of the United States who have no such opportunities near their homes. Western Montana still has the opportunity to preserve and develop an outdoor recreation industry of the highest quality which could well provide one of its most important economic foundations, and at the same time to use its water resources for developing industry and agriculture. We must then resist any further dam building which will encroach upon the unique values of our wild and semi-wilderness rivers and their watersheds. These are of irreplaceable value to Montana's high-quality recreational land and wilderness areas.

We wish, therefore, to present the following classification system for our major rivers and streams with regard to present and future recreation values and their relation to other uses. This classification might well serve as a guide to conservationists of the State in future planning for development of the water resources.



## Classification Scheme for Rivers and Streams

1. Wild Rivers -- Those that are free of impoundments and inaccessible except by trail. These streams and their watersheds are essentially virgin. They provide wilderness recreation. Few such rivers exist today.
2. Semi-wild Rivers -- Those accessible by road with watersheds still largely in virgin condition and shorelines undeveloped. They provide semi-wilderness recreation for small groups or for mass use.
3. The Semi-harnessed or Semi-developed River -- Those readily accessible by road, impounded or diverted in their lower stretches, with developed shorelines—including urban development—and characterized by heavy land use on the lower watersheds. Extensive parts of the upper reaches are still undeveloped and unimpounded.
4. Harnessed or Developed Rivers -- Those rivers that are either largely harnessed through impoundments and/or with highly developed, and used watersheds and shorelines. They are characterized by impoundments, artificial channeling, diking, and varying degrees of pollution. Though developed, they may have extensive stretches of water and shoreline valuable or potentially valuable for recreation.

The primary function of wild rivers is the protection of watersheds and for scientific, educational, and, particularly, recreational use. Recreation is wilderness type and of high and unique quality. Here in the West they are especially important. The water resource can be utilized in many ways further down the major river system. No impoundments should be permitted on these rivers.

The recreational function of semi-wild rivers is the same as for wild rivers. They are, however, more accessible and recreation, though of high quality, is not of wilderness type. With proper planning there can be more use of these rivers and their scenic watersheds for hunting, fishing, boating, and camping without abusing the resource. Impoundments should be small or altogether avoided except in cases where the natural watershed is not stable.

The semi-harnessed river has potential for dispersed recreation, and for mass recreation, including recreation development sites. The realization of the recreation potential depends upon managing the water and watersheds in such a way that the recreational quality of the water and immediate shore environments is not adversely affected.

The harnessed, and developed rivers offer tremendous potential opportunities for mass outdoor recreation. These are generally the lower portions of a river system located close to the users. The present recreation use is usually of mediocre quality. These rivers, if properly managed for their recreational resources could provide large and varied recreational opportunities for expanding urban populations. Pollution is a major drawback and must be remedied. It should be on rivers of this classification that further major impoundments are considered.

Tentatively and on the basis of present knowledge, we classify some of Western Montana's major streams, rivers, and adjoining lakes as follows:

### Wild Rivers

1. The South Fork of the Flathead River from the upper end of Hungry Horse Reservoir to the tributary sources.
2. The Middle Fork of the Flathead River.
3. The North Fork of the Blackfoot River.

### Semi-wild Rivers and Streams

1. The North Fork of the Flathead River
2. The Swan River, including Swan and Lindbergh Lakes
3. The Blackfoot River
4. The Clearwater River, including the lakes of the chain and Placid Lake
5. The Yaak River
6. Rock Creek (Clark's Fork tributary)
7. Larger tributaries of the Bitterroot River.



#### Semi-Harnessed, Semi-developed Rivers

1. The Bitterroot River proper (Missoula to West Fork junction)
2. Flathead River proper above Kerr Dam (including Flathead Lake)

#### Harnessed, Developed Rivers

1. Main stem of Clark's Fork (below Bitterroot River junction)
2. Main stem of Flathead River (below Kerr Dam)

We have a firm determination to oppose any impoundments on rivers classified as: 1. Wild Rivers, and 2. Semi-wild Rivers. Specifically, we will oppose a dam at the Nine Mile Prairie on the Blackfoot River, Spruce Park on the Middle Fork of the Flathead, and Glacier View or Smoky Range on the North Fork of the Flathead, and any other dams contemplated on the upper reaches of our river systems.

We will consider support for dams or authorizations for dams on the main stem rivers already partially harnessed and developed. Support for dams on these rivers, however, will be forthcoming only when complete studies of the impact of the projects upon wildlife and other recreation resources have been completed and appropriate funds requested or allotted for restoration of wildlife and recreation values. It is our firm belief that outdoor recreation values should receive equal consideration with other major water uses in any well-balanced water use program.

We believe the basic issue at stake is not a decision to build one dam in preference to another, but to practice sound resource management in Western Montana by confining the construction of dams—if any are necessary and justified—to the lower reaches of the major rivers, leaving the upper tributaries largely undeveloped for high-quality recreation. This principle holds—whether the dams are to be constructed by federal or private agencies.

This association is made up of members from widely varying professions. These members believe in a well-rounded economic development for Western Montana, but also believe that the inclusion of recreational resources has hitherto wrongly been considered a minor factor in such economic development.

The Western Montana Fish and Game Association further concurs in the Statement of Conservation Policy of the National Wildlife Federation, and hereby specifically emphasizes the following points from that policy in connection with water management:

1. We believe it is basic that programs for prevention of floods should begin on the uplands with proper watershed management—proper lumbering practices, proper range management, and reforestation.
2. We assert the principle that the producer of contaminating wastes, whether citizen, industry or municipality, has a social responsibility and moral obligation voluntarily to prevent the pollution of public waters. At the same time we recognize that regulations and enforcement are necessary to restore and to preserve clean waters. In keeping with the aforementioned principle, and in recognition of growing water short ages and of the seriousness of the pollution menace to the public health and welfare, the Association believes in the following policies and objectives in water pollution control: (a) Sound and effective pollution control laws and programs in every state. (b) Adequate federal authority to clean up pollution in interstate waters in cases where the states, interstate or private agencies cannot or will not do the job. (c) Adequate sewage treatment facilities in every community; adequate waste prevention or waste treatment by every industry.

3. Primary responsibility for the planning of river basin development should not rest with construction agencies whose engineers lack training in the appraisal and management of biological resources. The first Hoover Commission recommended creation of an independent "Board of Analysis" to pass on projects proposed by the Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and other Federal agencies concerned with water development. We favor the creation of such a board.